

The model of information transfer developed by Lancaster and Warner provides a useful centerpiece to discussion about the growth of the cycle over the last twenty years. From my short experience in the field I can say that it accurately depicts the traditional roles and responsibilities to which authors, researchers, publishers, and librarians had grown accustomed. More importantly right now, it makes it relatively easy for us to locate the stressful effects of new communication technology on a map of information movement.

Like several of my classmates, I see the rapid pace of information exchange via the internet as the dominant change agent. Specifically though, I cannot help but try to visualize the tension this change creates between Primary/Secondary Publishers and Information Centers.

Lancaster and Warner explain that publishers engage the user community "directly through subscriptions and purchase by individuals," and alternatively, "through subscription and purchase by information centers." [page 1] When they may acquire them from the publishers, information centers meanwhile provide the service of organizing and controlling access to the documents by a general audience. It is my observation that, as electronic indexes and databases widen accessibility and supplant their analog predecessors, publishers are increasingly keen to adopt the responsibility of organization and control for themselves. Drexel's own library system, as a result, often needs only to provide its population of users with login information to the databases organized and controlled by primary and especially secondary publishers.

The primary benefit of the information center in this example, and the one that keeps full cooptation of roles by the publishers unfeasible, is the sheer expense of subscriptions. In fact the movement among many academics to circumvent these costs with a more open publishing model, even developing them through their universities' library systems, indicates the real opportunity for information centers now that authors' lines of communication with user communities have been shortened. Information professionals can retain and consolidate their roles in the information transfer cycle insofar as they become responsible for the communication technology through which the evolving cycle is routed.

Lancaster and Warner rightfully, and somewhat prophetically, account for their model's lack of attention to "informal"--albeit important--channels of communication. Reading their description, it is difficult for me not to think immediately online resources to which authors and users turn:

Both [formal and informal channels] disseminate the results of the same experience or research, but the informal channels disseminate

information in a different format or in the same format but at a much earlier time...They are important because they disseminate information more rapidly than the formal channels, at least to those individuals who are well integrated in a professional community, and because they disseminate information to some individuals who choose not to use the formal channels. [3]

What I'm left to wonder is this: precisely how routine must communication and information transfer through these channels become for them to be considered "formal," and to be adopted into a comprehensive model/diagram of the information transfer cycle? If we were to incorporate them now, I envision an enduring role for information professionals. Having served aprecedented role in the conventional information center (ie. library), information professionals are ideally situated to apply their duty of organization and control, only in a new venue. Moreover they may retain a degree of the acquisition responsibility that we would intuitively expect to recede as informal channels develop. It is in fact my expectation that as informal channels are popularized online, they will inevitably evolve distinct shapes of their own (literally formalize) and make opportunities for complimentary designed, virtual information centers.